

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Bob Stump, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BOB STUMP

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING ON POSTURE OF U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND

Today, the committee meets to hear testimony regarding the posture of U.S. armed forces within the Southern Command area of responsibility.

However, before proceeding, I would like to take a moment to recognize the tragic loss last week of our good friend and committee colleague, Norman Sisisky.

Norm was serving as the Ranking Democrat on the Procurement Subcommittee and had also served as Chairman of the Investigations Subcommittee during the 103rd Congress. But his real contribution to the committee took many forms and touched many areas. Norm Sisisky brought a degree of intellectual rigor, common sense, and wry humor to many difficult and important national security issues over the years. As one of those members that you could count on to never miss a meeting, I know I will miss his sly smile and pleasant manner every time I step into this room.

While we have all lost a true friend, America has lost a great patriot and faithful public servant.

In honor of Norman Sisisky's memory, I ask that the Committee observe a brief moment of silence.

Turning to the subject of today's hearing, our nation has many vital and enduring interests in the U.S. Southern Command region. For example, nearly forty percent of all U.S. trade is conducted within the hemisphere and the United States imports more oil from Latin America and the Caribbean than the entire Middle East.

At present, many countries in the hemisphere are struggling to combat transnational threats such as drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal immigration, arms trafficking, and terrorism. These

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threats undermine the political and economic stability of many countries in the region and place at risk democratic institutions.

Last year, the Congress greatly increased the amount of equipment and military training to the government of Colombia to assist that country in its counter-narcotics effort. Guerrilla and paramilitary forces funded by the production and sale of illegal narcotics number over 25,000 in strength and operate throughout Colombia and in parts of Panama, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.

Clearly, the United States has an obligation to assist a neighbor in need, but how we assist is the more appropriate question. The U.S. military is a unique instrument of national will and one that must be employed with considerable caution and care. As the new Administration reviews its policy toward the region, it is timely that this committee focus on the current state of events and understand the impact of ongoing operations upon our armed forces within Southern Command.

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